May, 2010

First off, welcome to the AP US History class for 2010-2011!

You have been selected for this wonderful opportunity to both learn more about this incredible experiment, The United States of America, and a chance to earn college credit in the AP exam at the end of the school year. Whether you are a US citizen or not, the lessons of America’s founding and development are a unique story that will energize and inform you, while permitting you to be a more enlightened *world* citizen.

This summer you will be reading *Founding Brothers* by Joseph Ellis. This book won the Pulitzer Prize for History in 2000. Professor Ellis teaches at Mount Holyoke University and is the author of many books about famous Americans like John Adams and Thomas Jefferson.

In this book, Ellis has chosen six events in our early history that shaped our nation’s direction. But more than that, his books focuses very personally on some of the people behind those events. Most of these people you have heard of: Jefferson, Adams, Washington, and Franklin, for instance. Some you probably know less about: Hamilton, Burr, and Madison.

Ellis believes that the personal relationships, as well as the events he has chosen, set us on the path to become the kind of nation we are today; for better or for worse. I encourage you to treat this book like a *reference*. You should underline, highlight, write notes in the margins, whatever it takes for you to dissect, analyze, and refine the key concepts, conflicts, and consequences of these human beings and their very human actions. Treat them like people in a favorite movie series or television show. You might be able to, after a while, predict their reactions and determine their motivations. Don’t see them as “the framers”, but as people with the inevitable spats, friendships, and egos that are the nature of any group of intelligent, difficult, and powerful group of people.

We see these thought processes every day, not just in our politicians, but in our sports figures, Hollywood celebrities, even our fellow students! Now, think of your classmates as the people who are in charge of setting up a representative democracy: *something on the scale that had never been attempted before.* The purpose of reading this book is to allow you to complete this summer assignment: a 4-5 page paper on these events.

You want to answer this question: Why did the author choose these six events? Some of the events are part of our national lore, others are almost certainly unfamiliar to the vast majority of Americans. And yet, this famous professor chose them.

Look for common themes and principles in these events. In order to help you organize your thoughts, I suggest you focus on the three which you think most clearly define your view of why Ellis chose these six events. If you think it is about the personalities, say so, and defend it with *specific and detailed examples from the book.* So much of this class will be about examining the primary documents, the records from the time, of our nation’s history. Let’s treat this book as if it were a document of our past. It’s not! But the methods will you use to evaluate the information and then back up your opinions with facts, will be a practice you will find handy on the AP exam.

I also suggest you keep a dictionary by your side while reading this book. Make sure it’s a substantive dictionary, not some paperback version for students. This is a course that should feel like a college freshman course. Give it the scholarship it deserves! Don’t hit a word you don’t know, assume you understand it’s meaning, and then move on. Words mean things, and authors sweat blood over getting just the right word or phrase. The founders also debated over exact words and their meanings. It’s one of the reasons we revere these men! Let’s allow their exact thoughts the best chance to be contemplated in your paper.

This 4-5 page paper should be double-spaced and follow MLA bibliographic form. If you want to do extra research, please make sure you have a “Works Cited” page at the end. Microsoft Word makes this very easy. Use standard internal note form for using quotes in MLA. You should quote infrequently. (it’s your paper, not Ellis’) Put the paper in a clear folder for **submission on the first day of class**. It is your ticket for entry.

We will have a great time talking about what we learned from this book, and I can’t wait to hear what YOU think. Have fun with this project; it should whet the appetite for getting to know more about the “land of the free and the home of the brave.” (Did you know the man who wrote those words actually opposed the war he wrote them about? “Fun stuff” like that awaits you!)

Meanwhile, have a great summer…I will eagerly await your fresh and enthusiastic participation in this adventure this fall!

Mr. Preston

I have set up a Wikispace for us to use for this summer…

Look for your invite to go there in the next few days!

<http://prestinosapushistory.wikispaces.com/>